

Oakley Farm Slopes, Cheltenham - 20/01069/OUT

Landscape and Visual – Further Consultation Response

Purpose of the note

This note provides a response to the Applicant's Landscape Architect's note 2021-02-03 MHP Design Observations to Council Landscape Comments. It also provides an initial response to the photomontage images submitted to Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) to illustrate the submitted housing proposals and landscape treatments.

It is to be read in conjunction with previous notes prepared in November 2020 that pass comments on the landscape and visual effects of the proposals and the landscape chapter of the accompanying Environmental Statement.

Format of note

The note is in two parts, firstly a response to the MHP Observations and then the initial comments on the submitted photomontage images.

MHP Design observations

Rather than adopting a further round of responding on a point by point basis I set down the common themes that are presented as explanation as why the proposals are considered as appropriate for this part of the Borough and the Cotswolds AONB. Each theme is paraphrased first and a response set in italics afterwards.

- Only part of the field will be developed – *This is correct but development will change the character of the whole site;*
- That the lower part of the fields are already heavily influenced by existing settlement – *There is greater proximity of built form to the lower part of the fields and this has been a historic influence on this part of the AONB with the former GCHQ buildings set to the lower side of the site;*
- That the natural qualities of the site will not be lost given the retention of the upper part of the field – *The natural qualities of the lower field will change to built form and the upper part of the field will remain heavily influenced in character terms by the new housing and the access route passing through it;*
- That the site is not characteristic of the overall AONB escarpment landscape character – *the site is characteristic of the AONB escarpment landscape character and its value has been confirmed by its retention and extension in the latest AONB boundary review;*
- That the development will open up new views to the escarpment – *but this argument does not take account of the harm the introduction of a major housing development would have on the overall collection of views or the long term effect of the tree belt across the site;*
- Housing is already seen ascending Harp Hill – *but not to the amount that these proposals would lead to;*

- Views back to the Site from the AONB escarpment are not unduly affected as the development is on the lower slope and is associated with existing, adjacent development – *views are affected and the change will be evident to visual receptors* with High sensitivity.
- That the natural qualities of the retained upper slopes, that people would have a new legal access to, will offset the harm generated by the development of the lower slopes – *proposed access improvements are being used to argue mitigation of landscape and visual effects*.

The last five points of the observations are specific points of disagreement that have been identified but there is one point of agreement with regard to the loss of the special qualities of the AONB from the area that is developed.

There are no comments made in the observations with regards to local and national planning policy compliance or the suggested Reserved Matters should you be minded to grant consent to the application.

Photomontages

Five photomontage images have been prepared by Andy Maw Designs on behalf of the Applicant.

The methodology used to produce the photomontages is explained at the start of the document. They are presented as Verified Images by the Applicant's advisors and at Type 4 of the Landscape Institute's Note 06/19 - Visual Representation of Development Proposals. Type 4 is the most detailed form of imagery.

Caveats are explained in the methodology.

The five Verified Images show the following;

- VP1 – View from Priors Road over Sainsburies' car park to the Site
- VP2 – View to the Site from the Cotswolds Escarpment
- VP3 – View to the Site from the Cotswolds Escarpment
- VP4 – View to main site access off Harp Hill
- VP5 – View to Site from footpath to western edge of Site

For each viewpoint an existing contextual image is presented – this is the before image of the existing view.

The baseline photograph is presented on an A3 sheet with a photomontage showing a completed development at Year 1 in a before and after arrangement to allow comparison of a summer scene with trees in leaf.

Again the baseline image is presented on an A3 sheet with a photomontage showing Year 10 after completion with further vegetation growth.

The A3 sheets are to be viewed at a distance of 255mm and held in a curve to best represent the view.

The final two images of the viewpoint sets are A1 representations of the Year 1 and Year 10 presented as single images to be held flat at 522mm which is the equivalent of arm's length.

Comments on the photomontages

- VP1 – Prior's Road shows the proposed houses and the increased sense of development when looking up Harp Hill.
- VPs2 & 3 – Show the development above the current Oakley housing area and the road through the open space to the north.
- VP4 – Illustrates the new opening with the removal of the existing boundary hedge.
- VP5 – From the western footpath between Harp Hill and Priors Road looks along the northern boundary of the development and takes in the retained upper slopes of the fields.

The photomontages are based on the current layout which may be subject to change but appear to reflect the proposals as submitted. They should assist Councillors, Officers and Members of the public alike to better understand the change to views and the landscape that would occur should the proposals be built.

All the photomontage images are based on trees in full leaf with the baseline imagery taken in September 2020. To gain a fuller understanding of visibility and visual amenity winter views would be helpful to show visibility through the planting to the north of the housing area when the trees are not in leaf.

A note of concern is recorded with regard to illustrated tree growth on VP's 4 & 5. The trees appear overly large at Year 1 which is effectively when planted and particularly at Year 10. The sloped site is not one that will aid tree establishment due to water run-off and increased mean wind speeds. This does not mean that trees will not establish but rather not put on the volume of growth as illustrated. Depending on final species choices the trees as illustrated appear somewhere between 20 and 30 years old in size.

If a similar level of enhanced growth has been used on VP1 this would again make the screening at Year 10 greater than can be expected at this point post planting.

Furthermore VP4 does not include any street lighting, entrance signage or vehicles that mark entrances to major housing developments. It appears remarkably clear and clutter free and devoid of ancillary features.

VP5 shows the effect of a changed land use i.e. recreational rather than agricultural to the upper part of the field. It also shows the level of visibility to the proposed houses at Year 1 and to only a small part of the upper AONB escarpment beyond. When the trees establish to the height indicated in the Year 10 image the AONB escarpment will be removed from sight from this location.

Stuart Ryder

1st March 2020